

Sermon for Chilton morning service 25th January 2026 Eliza Wheaton

Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (Our church – a community energised by the Holy Spirit)

While thinking about what to say this morning, I've reflected on two events members of my family have attended over the last couple of years where we've felt very much part of a community energised by one thing, or person in both cases. The first of these is the Taylor Swift concert at Wembley in August 2024, where we were among 92,000 people all singing like mad, all wearing friendship bracelets, and all focused on that one person on the stage (who fortunately was amazing!). The other I didn't go to but my younger daughter, who slightly to our surprise has really got into Formula 1, went to the British Grand Prix at Silverstone last year. She sat in the Lando Norris stand and was again surrounded by thousands of people all also wearing friendship bracelets (and lime green) and all united in wanting Lando to win (which fortunately he did!).

In both these examples, thousands of people were brought together by something they all wanted to share in. They had a common purpose. I expect in other areas of life they would have opposing views but here they were united in support, enjoyment and enthusiasm. It was an experience they shared together at the time and then with others afterwards.

As a church, what is that gives us energy and unites us as a community in the same way? Well, as is probably clear from the service so far it's the Holy Spirit moving among us, as shown at Pentecost in our reading from Acts. What I think is really important for us as a community to take from this reading is that those tongues of fire don't just descend on the twelve apostles. In chapter one of Acts, we are told that the apostles were with "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers", and then that there were about 120 people there (1:14-15). When "they were all together" at Pentecost and the fire rests "on each of them" (2:3) I would argue that over a hundred people are filled with the Spirit in that moment. The apostles take the lead, and it is Peter who addresses the crowd, but it is surely not only them speaking in different languages.

This fits with the passage Peter quotes, from the book of Joel (2:17-21), in which we learn that men and women, young and old, slave and free will bear witness to God and most significantly for this morning's theme, receive

the Spirit. In the Spirit, just as in Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” (Gal 3:28). The Spirit has come for the whole of this emerging community, not just for some members.

Why might this be the case – why for all, not a few? In 1 Corinthians, as we have heard today, Paul wrote that gifts of all sorts come from the Spirit. People will receive different gifts, so a range of people are needed to build the community and allow each person to focus on what they are called to do. The question of gifts is key to the church being energised and united by the Spirit, as we put our different skills to use in the light of the Spirit. It’s something that was recognised early on - in Acts chapter 6 the apostles commission seven men, including Stephen who was “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (6:5), to distribute food to widows so that they could concentrate on sharing the word, which was what they were called to do. The church, therefore, can be energised by the Spirit if all are free to use their gifts.

Another side to this is that to be a community powered by the Spirit, we also need to look for each other’s gifts and encourage them, welcoming people and what they can do into our community. We talked about this at one of the Village Hall Services last year. We are charged then with actively looking for the Holy Spirit in everyone and being open to finding it in everyone. As Pentecost showed, this is not something exclusive but inclusive. Everyone has gifts: “to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). We need each other to be able to be a community inspired by the Spirit.

This leads on to something I’m only going to touch on briefly as it is a topic for later in the series, which is the church’s relationship with the wider community. If the Spirit gives gifts to everyone, does that mean that part of being a community energised and united by the Spirit is seeing that the Spirit also moves and works outside the church? The Spirit works in unexpected ways and through unexpected people within the church – does it do the same outside the church? Today the church marks the conversion of St Paul – an extraordinary example of divine action in someone the early church were clearly shocked (and afraid) to see become part of their community. And what does the Spirit moving outside the church mean for us if we are a community also driven by the Spirit?

In terms of being a community energised by the Holy Spirit, what does all of this signify for us? I’ll go back to the concert and sport comparison –

how can we be united in a similar way in our churches, especially as we are driven by something far more powerful than what brought those people together, indeed by something that will last for eternity rather than for a brief period of time? How can we channel the energy of the Holy Spirit?

We should experience that energy on some level whenever we gather. That may feel a bit daunting – but in every service I think there will be part of it that the Spirit prompts us to notice, which speaks to us directly, and shows us everything we share with the people around us and our joint identity in Christ, no matter what other differences we may have. And this encourages us and gives us determination and purpose.

What is this purpose which the Spirit gives? It is to live in the light of the Spirit, which we can do in many ways. We can share the news of the most extraordinary event in history, Jesus' death and resurrection – there is no story more powerful to tell and to hear. As a community there is much we can do for God, including reaching out beyond our church family to our wider community and sharing the Spirit-led fellowship we have. We need to support and care for each other of course, but we need to go beyond that too. Being energised by the Spirit means not keeping our gifts and our fellowship to ourselves – it means we are a community whose main purpose is mission.

Eliza Wheaton

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